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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a study of the instructional activities in reading used by 759 Alabama teachers of kindergarten through grade nine. Activities are described in the context of how instruction is organized, the professional characteristics of the teachers, and the methods and materials used in reading instruction. In summarizing the results, the report notes that the most distinguishing characteristic of reading instruction in Alabama is the variety of approaches, materials, and attitudes present in the classrooms. Questions about reading instruction that need to be resolved by further research and coordination are listed. (GW)

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Alabama Education Study Commission

THE TEACHING OF READING IN ALABAMA SCHOOLS

Project To Achieve Educational Excellence In Alabama

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THE TEACHING OF READING IN
ALABAMA SCHOOLS

A Report Prepared For The
Alabama Education Study Commission

by

B. D. Whetstone
June, 1974

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Introduction

The Alabama Education Study Commission presented an inventory of Alabama school systems to the State Legislature in June, 1973. One part of this inventory described the instructional programs in the school systems and another part described student performance. The inventory indicates that eighth and eleventh grade students in Alabama score from one to two years behind a national average in reading, language, and mathematics. In response to these data the two houses of the State Legislature adopted a joint resolution declaring the top priority goal for education in Alabama to be proficiency in reading.

The State Department of Education and the Study Commission were designated by the Legislature to coordinate all efforts to upgrade reading levels of students at all grade levels in the public schools. As part of this effort to develop a plan to upgrade reading levels, the Commission initiated a survey of reading instruction in order to determine what is currently being done in the classroom to teach reading. This survey represents a "state of the art" of teaching reading in Alabama. It is anticipated that this status report will serve as one of the bases from which the Commission and the State Department of Education may develop a comprehensive plan for improving reading achievement in Alabama.

Procedure

Data from the 1973 Inventory gave some general indications of instruction and student performance as they exist in the 126 school

systems in Alabama. These data were reported from the central office in each school system. The survey on which the present report is based accumulated data from a sample of 759 classroom teachers in Alabama who teach reading in kindergarten through ninth grade. Fifty-eight schools were selected at random from a random selection of thirty-four school systems. Some structuring of the selection of schools within a school system was applied in order to accumulate data from teachers at every grade level within a system. For example, if the first school drawn from a school system was made up of primary grades only the next selection was from a list of the intermediate grades schools, and so on.

Each teacher in each school was interviewed if teaching reading was any part of that teacher's assignment. The superintendents and principals cooperated in arranging a normal school day when each teacher could be visited in the classroom by an interviewer. The interviews were conducted, where possible, in the teacher's classroom and before or after the interview the interviewer observed the classroom in operation in order to verify some of the data provided by the teacher.

Interviews were conducted from an interview schedule which contains questions about classroom and school organization for teaching reading, characteristics of reading teachers, and the instructional program. Each interview required from ten to thirty minutes of the teacher's time with the average interview consuming about fifteen minutes.

The interviewers were college seniors who were majoring in elementary education. The training of interviewers took place in December, 1973 and the actual interviews with teachers took place in January and February, 1974.

The number of teachers interviewed by grade level is:

K-3	374
4-6	215
7-9	86
Titles I and VI and Special Ed.	84
Total	759

The results of the interviews are reported by grade level according to the three major areas of inquiry:

Organization of the Reading Program

Staff Characteristics

Materials and Methods used in Instruction

The participating school systems, superintendents, principals, and teachers were assured of anonymity to avoid unfair judgements being formed as a result of the data collected; therefore, they are not identified in this report.

Results

In this section results of the interviews are reported by percentages to indicate the frequency of the various practices in teaching reading. There is no value applied to high percentages that would lead one to surmise that widespread practices are correct and minority ones are wrong.

The results are reported in three classifications of teachers: those who teach kindergarten through third grade; those who teach grades four through six; and junior high school teachers (grades seven through nine).

Within each section the term "teachers" refers to those who teach reading and who were interviewed for this survey. While it may be probable that the teachers interviewed are a fair representation of the reading teachers in Alabama it may be possible that some unique organizational structure, practice, or material may not be included in this survey.

Organization for Reading Instruction - Kindergarten through Grade Three:

The percentage of teachers of reading in grades K-3 who divide students into groups within their classes for reading instruction is eighty-one.

The breakdown of the percentage of teachers that divide students into groups by size is:

<u>% of Teachers</u>	<u>Number of Students in each group</u>
63%	6-10
14%	11-15
11%	20 or more
9%	1- 5
3%	16-20

Children are placed in homogeneous groups by eighty-three percent of the teachers, that is, homogeneous in reading ability.

Three percent of the teachers form groups made up of children with wide ranges of reading levels (heterogeneous grouping).

Thirteen percent of the teachers organize reading instruction by inter-class grouping within the school. For example, several primary classes plan and organize reading cooperatively with students from several classes comprising a reading group. These groups are homogeneously grouped by reading ability.

Seven percent of the primary teachers do not group children for instruction. They teach reading by using large group instruction with individual practice.

Twenty percent of the teachers interviewed use individual prescriptions in teaching reading in addition to using small group instruction.

There are many teachers who use a variety of organizational approaches for teaching reading. For example, some teachers use the large group approach for teaching certain skills, small groups for other skills, and programmed instruction for assisting slower students on an individualized basis.

The most common organizational practice in each classroom seems to be three or more homogeneous groups of 6-10 children who are on the same level of reading as determined by teacher estimate. Slightly less than half the teachers refer to achievement test scores to determine reading levels of children. Very few (five percent) of the teachers group children according to intelligence.

There is a wide variation in the amount of time allocated for language arts (reading, phonics, speech, spelling) instruction in

each teacher's classroom. One percent of the teachers allocate less than ten percent of their students' instructional time to reading while four percent require their students spend eighty percent of their time in language arts. The following figures show the percentage of the school day teachers require students to allocate to language arts instruction by the percent of teachers reporting the requirement:

<u>% Time</u>	<u>% Teachers</u>
0- 9	1
10-19	13
20-29	16
30-39	14
40-49	14
50-59	17
60-69	7
70-79	13
80-89	3
90-99	0
100	1

Scope and sequence are two formal structures which designate the reading skills (content) and the order in which they are to be taught. The two terms are often used together in the sense that they indicate one structure; therefore, scope and sequence as used in this report refers to a single concept -- what is taught arranged in the order in which instruction occurs. Scope and sequence of reading programs is usually contained in a curriculum guide

developed by a teacher, a committee of teachers, or an administrative level supervisor. The scope and sequence may apply to one or several grade levels or an entire school or school system.

Slightly more than half the teachers have access to scope and sequence of reading instruction. About one-third of these teachers work from scope and sequence for one grade only; one-third use one for the primary grades only; and the remaining one-third use scope and sequence which has been developed for the entire school.

Most teachers (eighty-two percent) report that records of reading progress of individual students are maintained; however, ninety-four percent of those teachers maintain the records outside the classroom. About one-third of the students have access to their own records. About four percent of the teachers interviewed maintain duplicate sets of records of reading progress, one for the permanent file and one for the teacher's file.

All teachers interviewed use some method of determining individual students' reading levels. The most predominate methods used are group tests (usually achievement in reading), teacher-made methods and a combination of these two methods. Twenty-five percent of the teachers use a variety of methods for determining reading level while seventeen percent use results of individual tests. In schools where a well defined scope and sequence is used, the reading level for each student is established by level checks, or tests, built into the scope and sequence.

Staff Descriptions - Kindergarten through Grade Three:

The student/teacher ratio in classrooms where reading is taught is variable and depends on the flexibility of the program. While a teacher may be responsible for 31 children in a classroom, there are usually 6-10 students receiving instruction in reading at any given time. Teachers are able to reduce the student/teacher ratio in a number of ways. The most common practice is to divide the class into three groups. Seventy-two percent of the teachers use this method to some extent resulting in less than ten students in each group. While the teacher is working directly with the reading instruction group the remaining children are usually given independent or group work to keep them occupied.

Another method of reducing student/teacher ratios is similar to that described above, except that a teacher's aide may assist the students who are not involved in an instructional group. Twenty-one percent of the teachers have one or more volunteer aides for reading and twelve percent of them have aides employed by the school.

Sixty-three percent of the teachers had one or more courses in reading instruction in undergraduate school, twenty-eight percent had three or more courses, and eight percent had none. Courses in reading instruction are defined as materials and methods of teaching reading, children's literature, phonics, and related language arts. Thirty percent of the teachers have had one or more graduate courses in teaching reading.

Eighty-three percent of the teachers are certified at the Class B level (bachelor's degree and professional certificate) while sixteen percent have Class A or AA certification. One percent of the teachers interviewed have sub-professional certification.

Eighteen percent of the teachers are working under leadership and guidance of a person trained in supervising reading instruction.

Ten percent of the teachers have undergraduate majors in fields other than elementary education. Home economics, English, and secondary education are the fields represented most prominently among these teachers with social studies, music and psychology ranking somewhat lower. There are 14 major fields represented by the teachers of grades K-3 interviewed other than elementary education.

Instructional Programs - Kindergarten through Grade Three:

Two types of materials are generally used in reading instruction - basal reading series and supplementary materials. All teachers have access to one or more basal reading series from which they conduct basic instruction in reading. Basal series published by Scott-Foresman, Houghton-Mifflin, and Ginn are used by most of the teachers of reading. Thirty-six other publishers of basal readers are represented in the classrooms of teachers interviewed.

Most school systems provide a standard basal series to each school within the system and individual schools may select and purchase an additional series in order to provide teachers with optional approaches to basal instruction.

Three types of supplementary materials are used most often by the teachers interviewed: workbooks published by the same company which publishes the basal series, teacher-made worksheets and materials, and the Science Research Associates reading laboratory. A variety of tapes, recordings, filmstrips, programmed books, student news weeklies, phonics workbooks, and reading machines are also used.

Seventy-seven percent of the teachers have access to a resource center within their respective schools. The resource centers contain supplementary material and audio-visual equipment and materials for language arts. Schools vary in the quality and amount of instructional materials kept in resource centers.

Over half the teachers (fifty-three percent) use a phonetic approach in the initial teaching of reading and in addition (thirty-one percent) use a combination of approaches which includes phonics. Fifteen percent of the teachers use the language experience approach as the characteristic method of teaching reading, five percent use the linguistic approach, six percent use programmed instruction, eight percent use the "look and say" method and three percent use the Initial Teaching Alphabet. It was difficult for most teachers to determine their most characteristic method especially in cases where the basal reader stresses one method of learning to read and the teacher and/or supplementary materials stresses another. Generally, most teachers said they followed the approach characteristic of the basal reader they used.

Oral reading is stressed by the teachers interviewed. Sixty-five percent of them hear each child read every day. Twenty-eight percent hear each child read orally every other day and eight percent check oral reading on a weekly basis.

The most predominate method employed by teachers to evaluate reading progress resulting from instruction is observation. Standardized test and teacher-made tests are also used frequently to evaluate progress, seventy-one percent of the teachers use some combination of observation and tests to measure progress.

Organization for Reading Instruction - Grades Four through Six:

Two-hundred and fifteen teachers of reading in grades 4-6 were interviewed. This number is a little more than half the number interviewed in grades K-3. The primary reason for the difference is that many schools begin to departmentalize their faculties after the third grade. One teacher in each grade may be designated to teach all reading classes for that grade in some schools.

Reading teachers in intermediate grades tend to organize reading instruction around larger groups than their counterparts in primary grades. Nineteen percent of the teachers organize children into large groups while sixteen percent teach large groups and assign individual practice. Only fifty-seven percent of the teachers use within class grouping and twenty-seven percent use within school grouping for instruction. Twelve percent of the teachers operate in a departmentalized context. Twenty-three percent of the teachers individually prescribe reading instruction for each student.

When small groups are formed for instruction they are usually homogeneous by reading ability. Only six percent of the teachers use any form of heterogeneous grouping.

Achievement tests and teacher devised methods are the most common criteria used for forming reading groups in the middle grades.

The amount of time a student devotes to language arts activities changes when he enters intermediate grades. Fifty-five percent of the students spend less than thirty percent of their time in language arts and thirty-seven percent spend from thirty percent to sixty percent of their time in language arts. About six percent of the teachers report their students spend over sixty percent of their time in language arts.

Less than half the teachers have access to scope and sequence of language skills taught. In about half the schools scope and sequence covers more than one grade and in the other half it is designed only for one grade.

A written record of reading progress for each student is maintained by seventy-eight percent of the teachers. Ninety-two percent of these records are kept in a place other than the classroom; however, more than half the students (fifty-eight percent) in the intermediate grades have access to their records.

Teachers of reading in the intermediate and primary grades use approximately the same techniques for determining each student's reading level. Group achievement tests, teacher-made devices and a combination of these two techniques are used by ninety-two percent

of the teachers interviewed in the intermediate grades.

Staff Descriptions - Grades Four through Six:

Teachers of reading in the intermediate grades tend to arrange students in larger groups for instruction than primary level teachers. About one-third of the teachers in grades 4-6 teach reading to an entire class of 20 or more students, about one-third of them divide their classes into groups of ten or less and one-third have reading groups of 10 to 20 students. The size reading group found most often in the middle grades is larger than 20 students. Since the groups vary in size from 5 to 20 or more there is no reasonable way a general student/teacher ratio may be devised and reported at the instructional level.

The undergraduate training of the teachers in intermediate grades is similar to that of the primary grades teachers with regard to the number of courses completed in reading instruction. On the other hand, the teachers of intermediate grades show a slight edge over primary teachers when their graduate school experiences are analyzed. Forty-two percent of the intermediate grade teachers have completed at least one course in reading instruction at the graduate level.

The percentage of teachers who have sub-professional, Class B, and Class A certificates indicates that teachers of intermediate grades have slightly more graduate study than primary teachers; but, more intermediate teachers have undergraduate training in areas other than elementary education and reading. About one-third of the intermediate grade teachers have undergraduate majors in secondary

education, home economics, English, social studies, psychology, music and a variety of other subjects including speech, physical education, science, art, and history.

Teacher aides for reading instruction are found in one-third of the teacher's classes in grades 4-6. About half of these aides are employed by the school system and the other half are volunteers from colleges and parents.

A supervisor or resource person with proficiency in reading instruction is available to twenty percent of the teachers interviewed.

Instructional Programs - Grades Four through Six:

Teachers of reading in grades 4-6 report that a large variety of basal reading texts are available for instruction. Two series, published by Houghton-Mifflin and Scott Foresman, seem to dominate the basal field. Certain publishers have more basals being used in the intermediate grades than in primary grades (D. C. Heath, Charles Merrill, Random House, McGraw-Hill, Laidlaw, and American Book Company). Although most publishers of basal series produce books for both primary and intermediate grades, some preferences are being shown for one publisher's materials at one level and a different one at another level.

A review of the supplementary materials used by intermediate grade teachers indicates a reliance on workbooks correlated with the basal readers being used, although many teachers (forty percent) use the SRA laboratory kits.

A resource center within the school is available for use by seventy-six percent of the teachers in intermediate grades.

Phonics is the characteristic method of teaching reading applied by forty percent of the teachers. Twenty-six percent of the teachers use a variety of approaches which usually include phonics. Although the language experience and programmed instruction approaches are used by many teachers the characteristic method is one which involves phonetic analysis.

The frequency of oral reading performed by the students diminishes in the middle grades. One fourth of the students read orally each day and one-fourth read once a week. Almost half the students read orally every other day and eight percent read orally occasionally.

A combination of teacher-made devices and standardized tests are used by over sixty percent of the teachers. Teacher observation seems to be the method used most frequently by over half the teachers to evaluate reading progress.

Organization for Reading Instruction - Grades Seven through Nine:

The teachers of reading, language arts, and English at the junior high school level were interviewed. Some English teachers who do not include instruction in reading skills are included in this study. Organization for teaching reading varies among the junior high schools. In some schools the junior high reading program is coordinated with the elementary reader school program in order that students may continue their development of reading skills. In some junior high schools there is no reading teacher, as such,

but there may be one or two English or social studies teachers who are responsible for reading instruction for students who are reading below grade level. In other junior high schools there is no formal plan for reading instruction and whatever reading skills are taught are selected by individual teachers. Some teachers reported they taught reading skills only if someone in the class needed the instruction.

Reading instruction is carried on in larger groups in junior high school than in elementary school. About half the junior high teachers divide their classes into smaller groups for reading instruction and about half teach in large groups, usually the entire class.

About twenty percent of the teachers use individual prescription for teaching reading and five percent use programmed instruction. Thirty-four percent of the teachers divide their classes into small homogeneous groups for reading instruction. The teachers report that only twenty-three percent of their groups are composed of less than twenty students.

Junior high teachers tend to divide their students into groups for instruction by use of achievement test results and teachers' estimates of ability.

Eighty-four percent of the teachers indicate that junior high students spend less than twenty percent of their instructional time in reading and language arts instruction, about one period per day.

A scope and sequence for reading instruction is available to only twenty-one percent of the junior high teachers. Where scope

and sequence is available it is developed for the entire school in about half the cases.

Individual records of students' progress in reading are maintained by about half the teachers. Half the teachers who maintain these records have them available for students to see within the classroom.

Reading levels for each student are checked and evaluated by group reading tests by almost half the teachers. About one-third of the teachers make and use their own tests of reading progress.

Staff Descriptions - Grades Seven through Nine:

The student/teacher ratio in reading classes tends to appear somewhat larger in junior high school than in elementary grades because there are fewer small groups at the junior high level. Only about one-fourth of the junior high teachers have any groups with less than twenty students participating.

Between seventy and eighty percent of the junior high teachers of reading have had no course in teaching reading. About one-fourth of them have had one or two courses in teaching reading at the undergraduate level.

There are more junior high school reading teachers who have masters degrees and Class A certification than elementary teachers at all levels. There is little information to determine how many of these teachers have masters degrees in reading.

Over half the junior high teachers interviewed have undergraduate majors in English while nineteen percent majored in secondary education and fifteen percent in history. The remaining

teachers indicate undergraduate majors in elementary education (eight percent); social studies (four percent); business (four percent); home economics; speech; French; science; and a variety of other fields.

Between eight and ten percent of the junior high teachers have volunteer or paid aides to assist them in the classroom during reading instruction.

There is a supervisor or key teacher in reading available to sixty-nine percent of the junior high teachers interviewed.

Instructional Programs - Grades Seven through Nine:

Over half the teachers interviewed have access to the basal reading series developed by Harcourt, Brace and World. Five other publishing companies seem to have their basal readers in use by ten to twenty percent of the junior high teachers: Houghton-Mifflin, Scott-Foresman, Harper Row, American Book Company, and McGraw Hill. Twenty-two other basal readers are found in use by various teachers in the junior high grades. It is apparent that some teachers use more than one basal reader for reading instruction.

Basal reader workbooks, teacher-made materials, and SRA reading laboratories are the most commonly used supplementary materials. Only about half the junior high reading teachers use supplements to the basal reader.

A resource center is available for use by sixty-seven percent of the junior high teachers.

Junior high teachers do not tend to commit themselves to a characteristic method of teaching reading. There is evidence that

phonics is being used more than any other method, although fifteen-twenty percent of the teachers use a combination of methods. At the junior high level the teaching of reading shifts from initial teaching to remedial teaching which may account for a larger variety of approaches being used.

There is a reduction in the number of times a student reads orally by the time he reaches junior high school. About half the students read orally on a weekly basis or longer.

Reading progress is evaluated through use of standardized tests by thirty percent of the teachers in junior high school. More than half the teachers use their own devices and observation to evaluate progress. Thirty-five percent of the teachers use a combination of techniques for evaluation of reading progress.

Analysis

This section of the report will include an analysis of the data supplied by the 759 teachers who were interviewed. No attempt to evaluate the reading programs in which they teach will be made. The difference in analyzing data and evaluating programs is that in analyzing data a determination is made as to whether the data seem to answer certain questions. An evaluation includes judgments which have to be made and this report shall stop short of making judgements about the programs, teachers, and schools visited.

The questions to which answers were sought by this survey are:

1. How are schools and classrooms organized to conduct instructional programs in reading?
 - A. Who determines the structure?
 - B. What criteria are used for forming structure?
 - C. How much time do children spend in reading or language arts instruction?
 - D. Is instruction organized around a common scope and sequence within a school or school system?
 - E. Are written records of students' progress maintained?
 - F. If records are kept, are they used?
 - G. How is a child's reading level established?
2. What are the characteristics of the teachers of reading?
 - A. What size instructional groups are formed by each teacher?
 - B. What are the teachers' levels of training in reading?
 - C. How much assistance does a teacher of reading receive?
3. What methods and materials are used to teach reading?
 - A. What are the most commonly used basal readers?
 - B. How much and what kind of supplemental materials are used?
 - C. Is there a resource center available for teachers?

- D. What is the most characteristic approach used for initial teaching of reading?
- E. How much emphasis is placed on oral reading?
- F. How do teachers evaluate progress in reading?

Organization for Reading Instruction

A general description of how schools and school systems plan and organize reading programs is made more difficult by the variety of organizational patterns discovered in the schools visited by the interview team. The data seem to suggest the operation of four basic patterns of organization for reading instruction ranging from a well-coordinated pattern to the extreme of no coordination among schools and teachers. The patterns also reflect the amount of attention being given to reading instruction as a high or low priority in each system.

Each pattern was reconstructed from the data received from the teachers and may not reflect the point of view of the central administration of the school system. If this is the case, then some problems of communication may exist within the school system. A description of each pattern is followed by an analysis of the instructional programs in reading that seem to fit the pattern.

Pattern A

The school system has a plan for teaching reading in all grades through junior high school which includes a well defined scope and sequence and adequate supportive materials. There is a person designated to supervise the reading program. Each school in the system follows the reading program model very closely.

There seem to be very few school systems which approximate pattern A. Two of the thirty-four school systems visited have defined a plan of teaching reading from first grade (or kindergarten) through a level of adult literacy - somewhere around junior high school level. Although the two systems have the program on paper there is evidence that the plan of implementation does not function beyond the sixth grade.

The interruption of a sequential learning program in reading at the junior high level seems to be directly related to the availability of federal funds to support the personnel needed to teach reading. Reading instruction is not a normal part of the junior high school program even where there is a plan of coordination of reading between feeder schools and the junior high school. Eighty percent of the junior high teachers who teach reading do not plan instruction from a coordinated scope and sequence. They are left on their own to plan and implement instructional activities.

Pattern A exists on paper; however, the extent to which the program is implemented within a school system depends on the leadership of the principals of the schools involved. In some school systems students may attend five different schools as they progress through twelve grades. This kind of arrangement makes coordination of the reading program difficult; however, the determination of the individual principals involved to continue a sequence begun in the lower grades makes the difference in effective coordination.

Pattern B

The school system has a loosely structured plan for teaching reading in elementary grades which is usually limited to the selection of a basal reading series to be used by each school in the system. There is a reading supervisor whose chief responsibility is to see that reading teachers use the adopted basal series properly.

Pattern B is found to exist in very few of the school systems visited. Some of the same problems as discovered with pattern A also exist with those systems who follow pattern B. The chief problem seems to be that there is one reading program on paper and another functioning in the individual schools. Interviews with the teachers and the principals revealed several reactions to the systems' reading programs. Some principals were unable to verbalize clearly the systemwide reading program while others described the program and their respective schools' role within the program very distinctly. Most teachers were aware that a systemwide program of reading existed while a few were not. Some teachers were aware of the systemwide program but they were unable or unwilling to apply the program to their own classrooms. It is not unusual to find a set of basal texts and supplementary materials in a classroom stipulated under the systemwide plan and another set of materials in actual use by the teachers. Thus, some teachers give the appearance of following the systemwide plan but actually follow their own programs.

This survey produces no evidence whereby one can determine the extent to which outcomes of reading instruction are affected to any significant level by this discrepancy between plan and procedure.

Evidence that such a discrepancy exists is shown by the reports of some of the interviews with individual teachers. For example, a teacher may indicate that she is using a basal text and supplementary materials which have a strong language experience approach to learning to read. Yet, she reports to the interviewer that the characteristic method she uses to teach reading centers around phonics. This response prompts the interviewer to take note of the supplementary materials available to the teacher which concentrate on phonics. Further description of reading activities and student work sheets verifies the possibility that a teacher is either misusing the basal material, using it on a casual basis, or not using it at all.

Systems which seem to follow plan B make some effort to increase the accountability of reading instruction by designating a person or persons to supervise the implementation of the system's reading program. Often the supervisor conducts workshops for teachers to upgrade their skills in teaching the adopted program. Many of these workshops are conducted by the representatives of the company that publishes the reading series adopted by the system.

Pattern C

The school system has adopted a basal series for general use by the schools in the system; however, there is no comprehensive plan or guidelines for teaching reading and there is no adopted scope and sequence for reading instruction. There are no personnel designated to be responsible for systemwide reading instruction.

The most characteristic pattern of reading instruction on a systemwide basis is pattern C in which some effort is made by a school system to coordinate a reading program, but little or no plan of follow-up is in operation to determine the extent to which the program is being followed. In only one school system were all teachers of reading aware of the existence and availability of an adopted program in reading instruction. Most school systems have a reading program defined either by the basal text or, in some cases, by individual school staff members; however, the teachers are not aware of the details of such a program and most have never seen a written statement of what the school system expects of the role each teacher is to perform in the reading program.

Pattern C implies little more than a committee or staff member selecting a basal text from the Alabama State list of adopted textbooks and ordering those books for each school in the system. Initial textbook purchases are usually followed by a flurry of workshops sponsored by the publisher to train the teachers how to use the new materials. The responsibility for the implementation of the reading program is not clearly defined in these systems although it is usually implied that each elementary school principal will define the quality of instruction expected of teachers under his responsibility.

Pattern D

Each school in the system has the responsibility for developing its own reading program. Within this responsibility there are two sub-patterns in operation:

Sub-Pattern 1 - The principal assumes leadership for planning the program for reading instruction, or the leadership is delegated to a teacher. There is a scope and sequence for reading instruction to which all teachers comply in planning their individual reading activities.

Sub-Pattern 2 - Each teacher is responsible for planning and initiating reading activities without regard to an overall plan for the school.

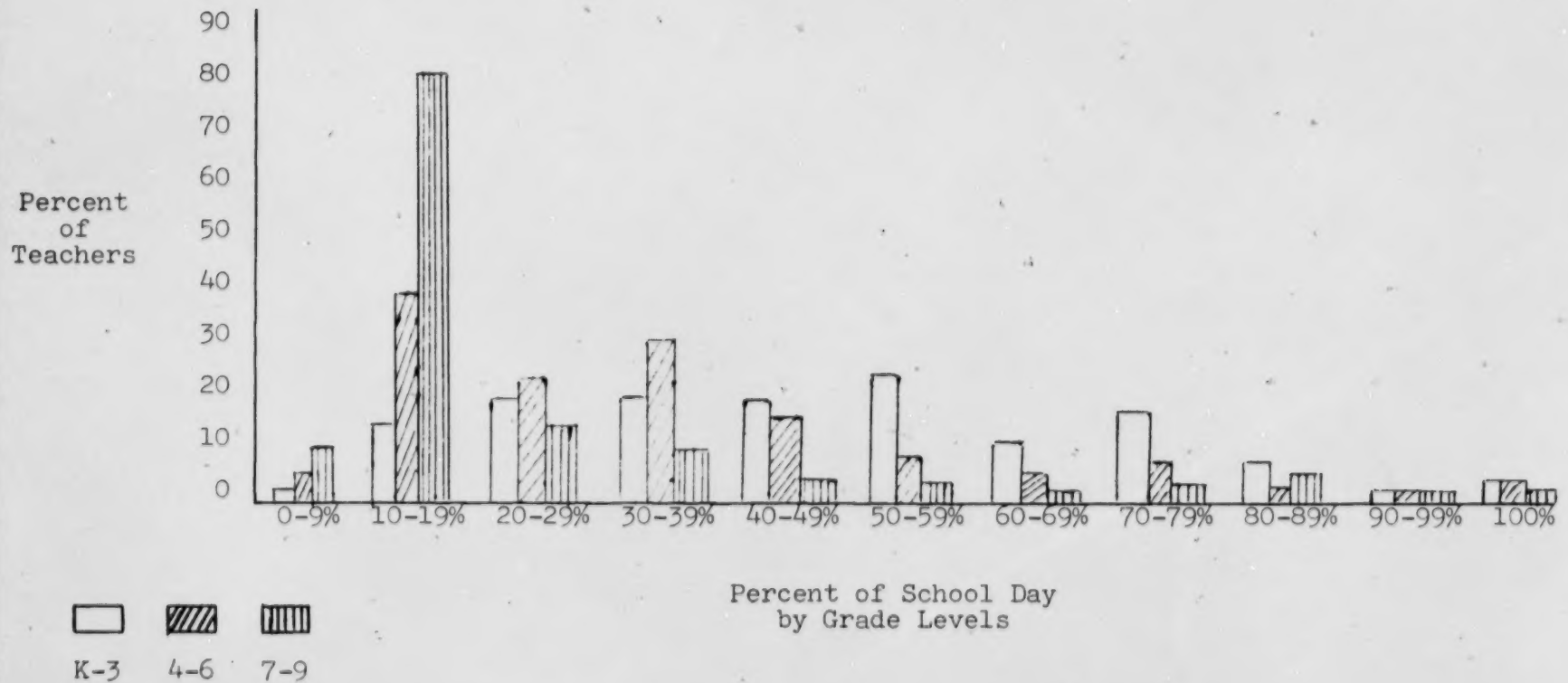
Pattern D is difficult to differentiate from pattern C because a school system may define its reading program, but schools within that system may ignore the official reading program. Without a means of accounting for the extent to which a school follows the system's program, a principal may well initiate a reading program for his faculty and students which is different from the adopted program. There is no concrete evidence that supports an official adoption of pattern D; however, its existence in many of the schools makes it a reality.

There are school systems which, by design or default, have left to each principal the responsibility for creating and implementing a program of reading instruction. Some principals accept this responsibility and take aggressive steps to establish quality reading instruction as a top priority (Pattern D-1). These schools are characterized by a sequential program of the development of reading skills. There is an awareness of levels of reading ability, achievement test results, and scope and sequence among the faculty. The most serious shortcoming of pattern D-1 is represented by an example in one city school system. The principal of the primary school has led his faculty in developing scope and sequence in

reading instruction. Each student has a record of reading achievement clearly defined on a permanent record which also serves as a reporting device to parents. Children are tested twice a year in each grade. At the completion of the third year the students enter fourth grade at another school. The principal in the intermediate school keeps all the records transferred from primary school "on file" thus interrupting the sequential program of developing reading skills. There is no effort on the part of the second principal to continue what the first principal began in reading. This same example often applies to students who leave elementary school to attend junior high school. The development of reading skills stops at grade 6 regardless of the students' reading levels.

Pattern D-2 illustrates the situation in which a principal is responsible for instructional leadership but delegates this responsibility to each teacher. In this case the reading program in a school or school system is only as effective as the individual teacher each child has for reading instruction. Table I illustrates the wide latitude teachers take in allocating instructional time for reading and language arts. In addition to time difference, schools which fit this pattern have a wide range of instructional methods, materials and attitudes present in the classroom. In one such school it was discovered that the three first grade teachers use different basal readers, emphasized three different approaches to reading and seldom compared notes with regard to reading instruction. The second grade teachers in this

TABLE I
PERCENT OF STUDENTS' SCHOOL DAY ALLOCATED TO LANGUAGE
ARTS INSTRUCTION BY PERCENT OF TEACHERS
AND BY GRADE LEVEL



school disagreed on the best approach to use with children who had been subjected to such a wide range of experiences in learning to read.

Another case in point is illustrated by the primary school which uses one basal series in the first grades, a different series in the second grades, and yet, a third series in the third grade. There is no evidence that would indicate what effect using the three different approaches has on reading achievement. The problem these data indicate is that coordination and planning in reading instruction is non-existent in some schools and some efforts should be initiated to determine if achievement may be improved through coordination and planning.

The description of the four patterns and two sub-patterns of reading discovered through interviews of teachers and principals does not suggest that these are models to be followed in evaluating reading instruction. There is no officially adopted model of organizing a reading program in Alabama; however, many teachers believe such a model to exist. When asked what guidelines or plan they followed in setting up their own plans for reading instruction, most teachers said they followed the "Alabama Course of Study". Subsequent inquiry revealed that most of the teachers who thought they were following the "Alabama Course of Study" could not produce a copy of the guidelines they said they were using. Also, the variability or organizational techniques used by these teachers suggests the use of various guides or none at all. There is a great deal of evidence that teachers of reading attempt to fit

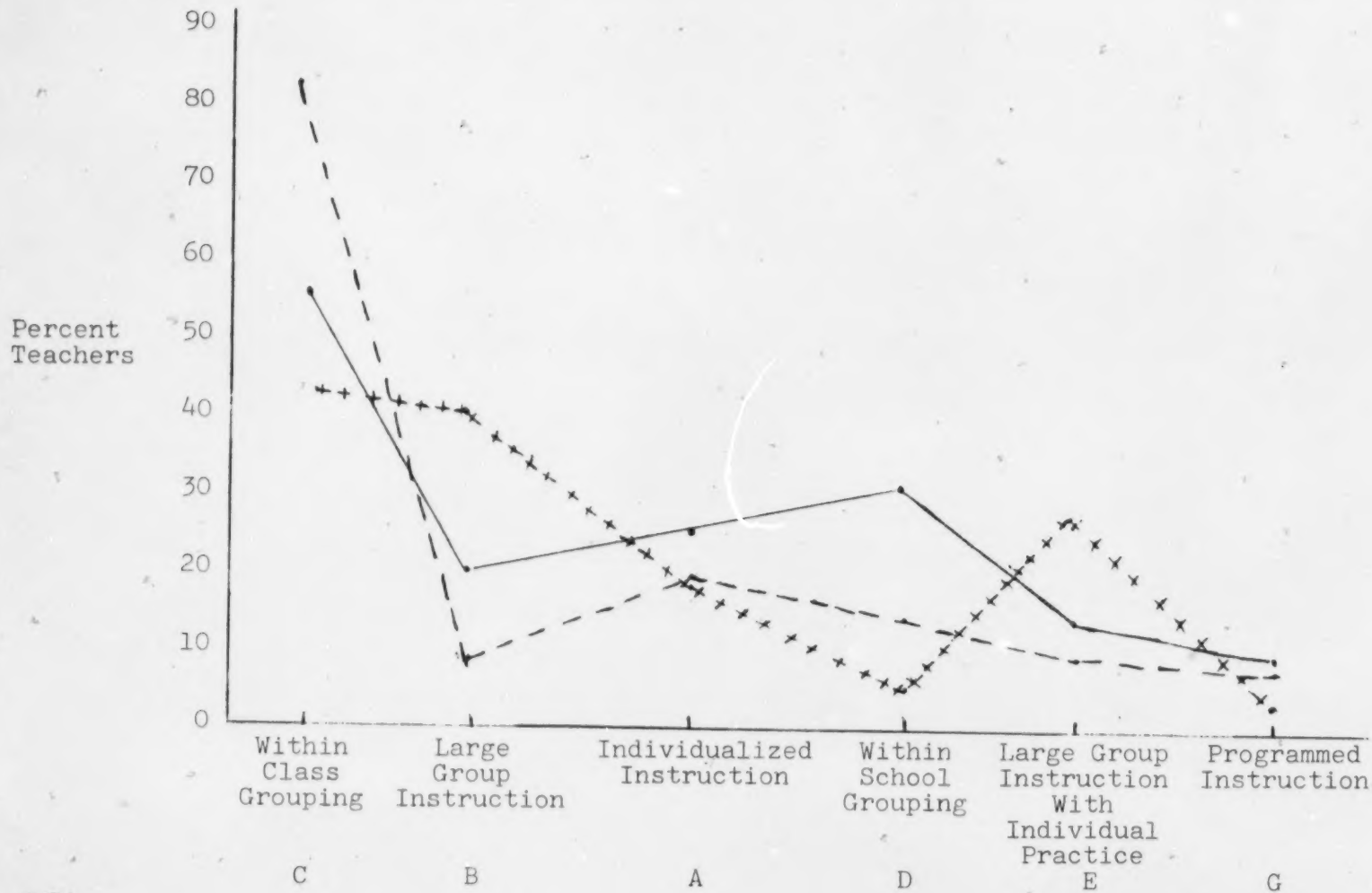
whatever organizational pattern that exists in the school system and in turn organize reading instruction in the classroom according to a wide variety of structures. The guides for the various structures of classroom organization apparently come from many sources - college training, curriculum guides, workshops, etc.

The nature of the training of teachers may provide some clues as to the origins of classroom structure and organization for teaching reading, while subsequent in-service training experiences may provide others.

Table II provides an overview of the percentage of teachers who use six different methods of organizing a classroom for reading instruction by grade level. Some type of grouping or individualizing instruction to fit a student's level seems to be used by most of the primary grades teachers; however, this pattern changes in the upper grades. There is insufficient data to determine the relative effectiveness of each of the various procedural structures. It seems necessary to analyze the individual teacher's organizational structures for teaching reading in the context of whether the structure is commensurate with whatever goals and objectives are set up for the reading program. Whether goals and objectives are a part of a systemwide or schoolwide comprehensive reading program or a part of an individual teacher's own plan would make a difference as to the long-ranged effectiveness of a teacher's efforts.

TABLE II

THE ORGANIZATION OF CLASSROOMS FOR READING INSTRUCTION
INDICATING PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS USING EACH TYPE BY GRADE LEVEL



Grades K - 3 -----
Grades 4 - 6 —————
Grades 7 - 9 +++++++

The Instructional Staff in Reading

Interviews with teachers of reading in grades K-9 indicate several trends.

First, the training of teachers shows a trend toward specialization in the higher grades. Primary grades teachers seem to reflect a broader background of training in the language arts areas while upper grades teachers tend to specialize. Part of the difference in backgrounds may be explained by the types of assignments given the teachers. Teachers assigned to primary grades are usually expected to teach all subjects while intermediate grades teachers may be assigned to teach one or two subjects. Junior high teachers are specialists in that assignments are made in a teacher's major or minor area.

The second trend is that teachers in higher grades have fewer training experiences in teaching reading and language arts. There is one exception to this trend. More intermediate grades teachers have had graduate courses in teaching reading than primary grades teachers; however, this is balanced by the fact that more intermediate grades teachers have undergraduate majors other than elementary education. Over eighty percent of the junior high school teachers assigned to teach reading have had no courses in teaching reading or language arts.

A third trend indicates that teachers tend to teach reading in larger groups and have fewer aides in the upper grades. Primary grades teachers tend to reduce the student/teacher ratio at the instructional level in reading by teaching students in small groups

and by using volunteer and paid aides to assist with the other groups. This procedure is followed in the fourth grade to some extent, but from the fifth to the ninth grade the students are placed in larger groups and the number of aides is reduced. Although the student/teacher ratio at the instructional level is increased in the upper grades the overall student/teacher ratio is decreased.

The fourth trend shows that the higher grade level to which a teacher is assigned the higher rank certificate the teacher holds. Primary grades teachers have lower rank certificates and less graduate study than intermediate grades teachers. Junior high teachers show higher qualifications on paper than teachers of middle grades. This trend can be somewhat distorted if interpreted out of the context of the types of graduate work undertaken and the certificate endorsement. For example, the junior high teachers of reading have more masters degrees, but they have fewer courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels in the language arts areas than primary grades teachers.

While ninety percent of the primary grades reading teachers have undergraduate majors in their assigned teaching areas, only two-thirds of those in the intermediate grades and one-half of those in the junior high grades are assigned to teach in their major areas of training.

There seems to be three major factors involved in describing the staff who teach reading in the public schools. One factor is the training and certification, the second is the teaching

assignment, and the third is the support given the teacher. Some of the teachers interviewed were trained as home economics teachers, received masters degrees in secondary education and are assigned to teach reading in elementary school. The assignment is not in line with the professional qualifications of the teachers.

It is also important to understand the amount and nature of supportive services given the reading teacher. Some teachers interviewed indicate that they have no aides, no reading supervisor, minimum support from the principal to develop a reading program, inadequate materials and little at-school time for planning. On the other hand, there are teachers who teach within a sequential reading program planned for the entire school system. The system provides leadership in program development and implementation. There is a person responsible for implementing and supervising the program and adequate resources provided the classroom teachers. Aides are provided to assist the teacher and release time for planning is built into the schedule.

Between these two extremes of supportive services lies a great variety of situations in classrooms where reading instruction takes place. It is apparent that many Alabama schools will have some difficulty in evaluating the effectiveness of teachers of reading because of the variations among the relationships of training, assignment, and support. Comparisons among teachers and schools would be difficult to justify in the absence of a systematic procedure for assigning reading teachers and providing supportive services.

The Instructional Program in Reading

Much attention has been given to the relative merits of various approaches to teaching reading in recent years. Some superintendents, principals, and teachers consider the task of selecting a basal reading program which would be effective in the hands of the teachers and children one of high priority. In some school systems the responsibility of selecting a basal series is designated to a committee, and in others one person may make the selection. While it is difficult to determine the extent to which selecting a basal reading series is, in effect, tantamount to selecting a reading program, there is considerable evidence that this is the accepted practice in many school systems.

In some school systems the basal reading series serves as a focus around which numerous other materials are purchased or developed. For example, in such a system each teacher may have a case of 10-12 basal readers, one or two other basal series containing 10-12 books, several supplementary workbooks, teacher guides developed by the system and a small resource center in the classroom containing 100 or more recreational paperback readers at several reading levels. At the opposite extreme of the continuum a teacher in a different system may receive 30 copies of a single basal reader and a workbook for each child.

The data indicate that every teacher of reading has access to a minimum of a basal reading series and supplementary workbooks or worksheets to accompany the basal readers. Few teachers

registered a concern of having too little materials for teaching reading.

Fifty-nine different basal series are being used by the seven hundred plus teachers interviewed; however, half of these series are being used by a single teacher. Two conditions seem to account for this phenomenon. Some of the teachers are using an edition of a basal series published many years ago and even though the newer edition is available (probably under a different publisher's name). A second condition exists whereby teachers are using as basal readers, materials developed for supplementing the basal series.

Four publishers of basal reading series seem to dominate the classrooms of the teachers interviewed: Scott-Foresman; Houghton-Mifflin; Ginn; and Harcourt, Brace and World (Janovich). Although these companies' books have been provided by school systems and placed in the teachers' classrooms there is some evidence to indicate that a wide variety of basal materials is being used. Whether the ancillary readers are being used in place of the adopted series or whether they are supplementary cannot be determined from the data in this survey. One primary grade teacher demonstrated for the interviewer how ineffective the basal reader was and produced a number of books which she ordered from an encyclopedia publisher at her own expense to replace the basal readers. Several other teachers showed the interviewer their preference for basal materials other than the adopted series in their classroom.

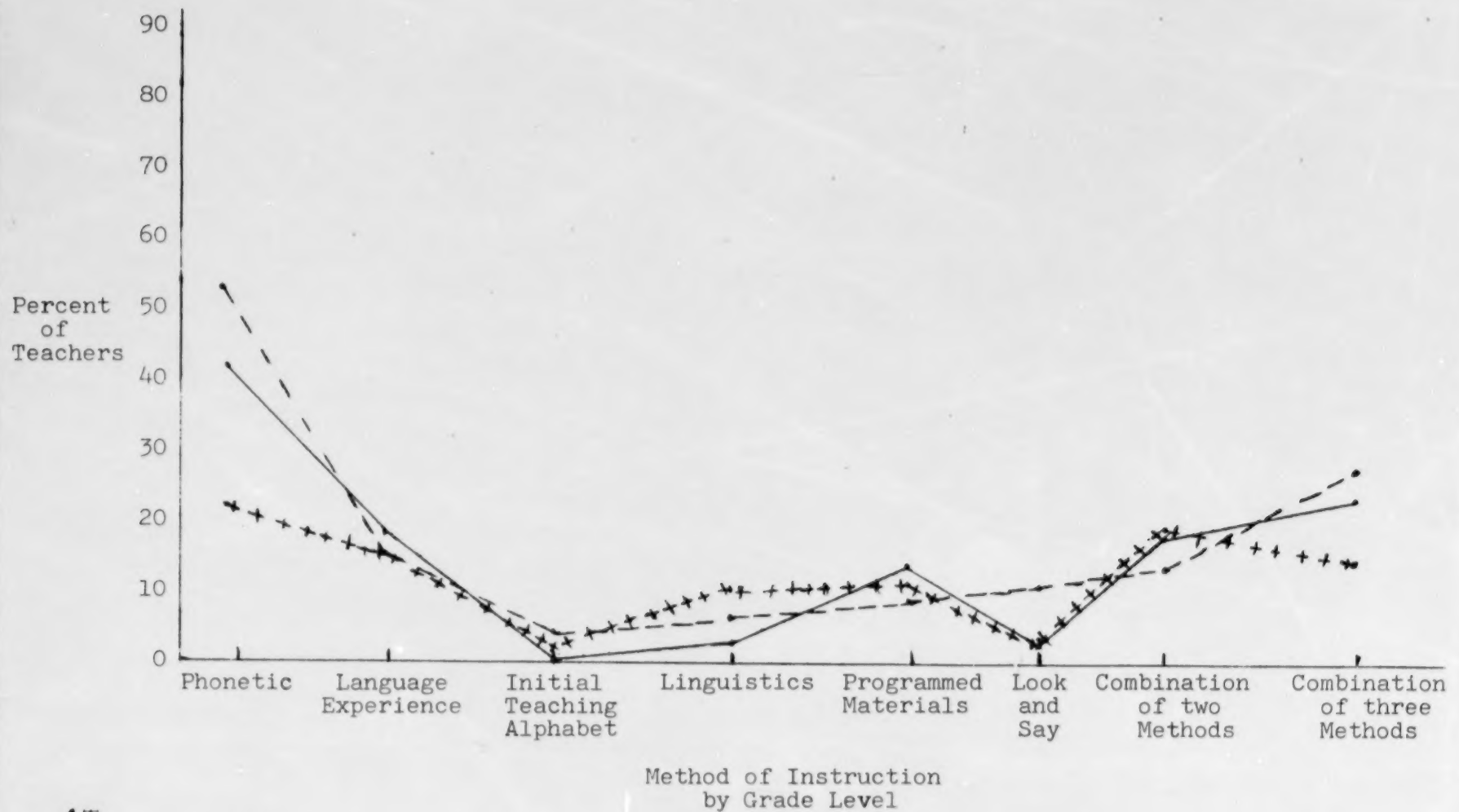
The teachers interviewed provided the interviewers with such extensive lists of supplementary materials used in support of the basal readers they used that the task of reproducing them would be of diminishing value. Eight categories of supplementary materials were abstracted from the list: basal workbooks, system-wide materials developed by the system staff, weekly newspapers, audio-visual devices, Readers Digest, teacher-made materials, Science Research Associates (SRA) reading laboratories, and phonics materials.

Teachers seem to have more latitude in selecting supplementary materials than in selecting basal readers. Most of the teachers interviewed have and use workbooks and some type of graded reading material (SRA, Readers Digest, etc.) to supplement basic reading instruction. The type of supplementary material chosen by the teacher may reflect their individual experiences. For example, in every school system except three, one or more teachers use the phonics series published by the Economy Co. Each of these teachers indicated some recent involvement in a workshop sponsored by that company for which college credit was received.

There is widespread use of phonics related materials across the State. Most teachers seem to use a combination of basic approaches to teaching reading; however, when pressed to indicate the most characteristic method they used almost half indicated a phonetic approach (See Table III). Some principals indicated during interviews that all teachers in the schools used the same approach to teaching reading, but the teachers interviewed revealed a wide

TABLE III

THE CHARACTERISTIC METHOD OF READING INSTRUCTION
INDICATING PERCENT OF TEACHERS USING EACH METHOD BY GRADE LEVEL



47

Grades K - 3 -----
Grades 4 - 6 _____
Grades 7 - 9 +++++++

range of approaches in use. This difference in program description and program implementation could produce many problems in analyzing the effects of various approaches to teaching reading. For example, if a program is described as being basically phonetic in its approach and several teachers use language experience in their implementation of the program it would be difficult to determine the effectiveness of phonics in the program. The interviewers reported that many teachers had difficulty in determining what was their characteristic method of teaching.

There seems to be a discrepancy between the types of instructional materials available for use by teachers and the characteristic method used in teaching reading. Part of the discrepancy may be explained by the fact that some teachers use one approach for the initial teaching of reading and another for the maintenance of reading skills. One teacher explained that in her third grade she teaches phonics to non-readers and linguistics to readers. Another possible explanation may be that some teachers teach reading, phonics, and spelling as three different subjects and fail to coordinate them into the act of learning to read.

Oral reading is a prevalent activity in reading instruction with more frequent occurrences being at the lower grade levels. Most teachers of reading require oral reading of students on a regular basis at least once a day or every other day. There is a need to develop data which show the relative effectiveness of the amount of time spent in oral reading and reading achievement.

Evaluation of reading progress is a complicated task according to the teachers interviewed. Most teachers use a variety of methods to evaluate reading progress. Standardized tests, observation, and teacher-made skills checks or tests are the devices used most often. The teachers are aware that achievement in reading as measured by standardized tests is the most commonly used method to evaluate reading progress by school administrators and the public. They are also aware that some of the evaluative techniques used in the classroom are capable of indicating progress in reading more realistically than the standardized tests.

The problems of evaluation are not unrelated to the problem of organization and staff. Evaluation procedures are more clearly defined in those schools which have well developed scope and sequence of reading instruction and a reading program in which objectives are clearly established and accepted by each teacher. The methods of evaluating and reporting progress are delineated within the scope of the program. Reading teachers left to their own devices for program development and evaluation seem to produce a variety of approaches and techniques for which there can be no reliable measure of accountability of teacher and student time consumed in reading activities.

Summary and Conclusions

This report has attempted to describe instructional activities in reading in the classrooms of 759 teachers in Alabama from

kindergarten through grade nine. These activities are described in the context of how instruction is organized, the professional characteristics of the teachers and the methods and materials used in reading instruction.

The most distinguishing characteristic of reading instruction in Alabama is the variety of approaches, materials, and attitudes present in the classrooms. Variety, in itself, does not usually suggest there is something wrong. In fact, the very nature of the professional responsibilities of teachers calls for some degree of academic freedom to choose instructional procedures and materials. However, in view of the attention being given to upgrading reading achievement in Alabama and to correct any deficiencies that may exist in instructional programs some structuring at a statewide level may be needed.

A wide variety of instructional approaches operating under several types of program structures makes objective description and evaluation of reading efforts cumbersome. The status of reading instruction in Alabama is that it operates in too many different contexts to compare one with another. It would be the same as comparing apples to oranges. Also, there are no established criteria of effective reading programs to which a reading program could be compared. There are obviously many procedures and materials in operation in the classrooms of Alabama for which there is no way, at present, to determine effects on an objective basis.

There are three steps needed to create a structure whereby a school system can communicate what it is doing in the area of

reading instruction, thus affecting structures for evaluation and accountability.

First, the entire system should commit itself to establish upgrading of reading instruction as the top priority for the system. This commitment must be communicated to every professional staff member in the central office and in each school and to the community.

Secondly, leadership roles and responsibilities should be defined in relation to the reading program. It should be clearly delineated who is responsible for leadership in the instructional program in reading, whether it is a reading director, coordinator, or principal.

Thirdly, a reading program should be designed and tailor-made for the school system. The program should follow some orderly procedure which guarantees that formal reading instruction will be given each student until an acceptable level of literacy is reached.

These steps are suggested to facilitate a monitoring system of reading instruction, not to suggest that current practices are either deficient or efficient. There is a need to know what practices are productive and to what extent they are effective.

There seems to be no evidence of a need to shift from the unstructured statewide approach to reading instruction to the opposite extreme - an official state-adopted program. The existence of a variety of programs in practice suggests that school systems may vary in their needs and resources. Some guidance, however, is needed at the state level to help school systems make a commitment

to reading, define leadership responsibilities and adopt a program. Once these steps are completed the school systems will be in a position to assess its needs in reading, define specific procedures and resources to meet these needs, and monitor and evaluate the program.

This survey raises several questions about reading instruction which need to be resolved by further research and coordination.

First, can reading achievement be improved through better coordination and planning of the instructional program on statewide and systemwide bases? The State Legislature has requested a plan for upgrading reading achievement and such a plan should include a research component to determine effectiveness.

Secondly, what are the minimum support services needed by a teacher in order to implement an effective program of reading instruction? This question needs to be approached from the standpoint of materials and supplies; aides; supervision; program and planning; and space requirements. Both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of these components should be explored.

The third question raised by the survey is in the area of teacher training and qualification. What type of pre- and in-service training experiences are needed by teachers of reading at each grade level?

Reading instruction in Alabama operates without a rationale that contains clearly stated goals and objectives. If such a rationale exists it has not been communicated to teachers in the

classroom. The final question raised by the survey is whether or not there should be a statewide rationale for reading instruction on which each local school system can base its own program of reading instruction. If such a rationale is needed, it should be broad enough to fit the needs of each local school system.